

PRESS CONFERENCE WITH MAJORITY LEADER,

STENY H. HOYER

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Tuesday, September 28, 2010

11:34 a.m.

Mr. Hoyer. Good morning. How is everybody? Well, welcome. We appreciate the fact that you're here.

The floor schedule is we are going to meet today. We have a very large number of suspension bills, most of which we believe are not controversial at all, and hopefully they will go relatively quickly. Well, relatively. When you got 80-plus bills that's a relative term. No votes are expected today. We're rolling votes until tomorrow. I hope there will be a minimum number of votes because I think most of these bills are, as I said, consensus bills.

On Wednesday we'll meet at 10:00 a.m. We will consider H.R. 847, the James Zadroga -- I'm not sure how you pronounce that name -- 9/11 Health and Compensation Act, which we had up before on suspension. This will be under a rule. This is sponsored by Representative Maloney and the New York delegation to compensate those who very bravely and without concern for their own personal safety went into the towers immediately after they fell and tried to save people, worked there, cleaned up, and were subjected to obviously health hazards.

We will also consider Senate amendments to the continuing resolution. We will consider that bill soon after it gets from the Senate to the House. Hopefully that will be sooner rather than later. We'll see what the Senate does on that.

In addition, we'll consider under rule Currency Reform for Fair Trade Act, which is possible to do under suspension of the rules. We're

talking to the Republicans. It was supported, came out of the committee on a voice vote. So it's possible it will be on suspension.

Other bills that we have pending, NASA, suspension bill, the Senate has passed a bill on that. Intel authorization, the Senate passed a bill on that. Child nutrition, the Senate passed a bill on that. So we have three bills from the Senate all possible for us to consider before the end of the week.

The Republicans last week issued a pledge to America. You've heard me say in the past that performance was clearly more important than pledge, that looking at what has been done under two economic programs, and the result of those, it seemed to me was what the American people would do and should do in terms of responding. Republicans announced this pledge and in fact admittedly, on their own admission, it was essentially, as Sessions, their chairman of the Republican Campaign Committee, said, a return to the same agenda that they had pursued that failed so badly and led to such a disastrous economic consequence and the loss of 8 million jobs and the deepest economic recession we've had in our lifetimes.

In addition to that, they continue to oppose legislation which would preclude the outsourcing of jobs from America to abroad.

On spending they proposed an additional \$4 trillion in national debt. The American public is rightfully very concerned about the national debt. We are as well, which is why we adopted statutory PAYGO, why we have a commission that is operating, and why the president presented a budget that is a reduced spending budget, and why we had

passed a budget enforcement resolution at numbers even lower than the President presented to us. But the Republicans, in the words of one conservative writer, Andrew Sullivan, said, quote, this is the most fiscally irresponsible document ever offered by the GOP, period, closed quote, Andrew Sullivan, conservative writer. He went on to say, quote, it was an act of vandalism against fiscal balance, period, closed quote. So on spending they not only want to have \$4 trillion of additional spending, they provide no specifics. One observer said it's spin, not specifics, spin not substance.

We do know they want to partially or wholly privatize Social Security and they want to have vouchers for Medicare. That is certainly something the American public cannot think are wise policies and have already rejected when President Bush suggested it. They continue to follow that in their program.

National security, frankly I think any fair analysis is that this administration has weakened al Qaeda and the Taliban, reduced our presence in Iraq, as was consistent with the plan and what the American people were told by this President, and that in fact we've taken out far more terrorists, far more al Qaeda leaders on both in Afghanistan and Pakistan than did the previous administration. We continue to be focused on terrorism and Islamic fundamentalist extremists as a threat to our people and our country.

They speak about government reform. The problem is when they were in charge we didn't have government reform. They failed to mention their number one objective. They say and they're pleading to

doing away with earmarks, and by the way they don't pledge to do that in their pledge. I'm not surprised by that because they quadrupled earmarks when they were in charge. We have halved earmarks and made them transparent and fully reportable by Members when they request them.

On health care, of course they want to repeal health care, substitute their own, which means that of the 35 million people we cover they might cover 3 million people, leaving a large number of people without health insurance and leaving the insurance companies still in charge. That's their pledge.

The Club for Growth, I called it milk toast, and then this is a quote from Club for Growth, quote, these guys just aren't ready to lead, period, closed quote. The Club for Growth, not any of us. Eric Erickson of Red State Law said, ridiculous pablum, it is dreck. David Frum said, who was with George -- President Bush said this, a pledge to do nothing, direct quote. Tony Perkins said it was a disappointment, Pat Buchanan said it was a mistake, and others have said it was a sellout. So that obviously there is a deep division within their own party as to whether this pledge is anything more than simply the young guns, as I have said, shooting a pop gun; almost no effect.

Now, let me say that in closing before I yield to you, there's a lot of talk about who is going to keep the House or who is not going to keep the House. We're going to keep the House. On every indication that we have in terms of how our candidates are doing around the country,

we've got good poll numbers on a lot of our Members that are in tough districts, including, as I have said Frank Cratovil in my own State, who is up by six points. We have operational strength, as we have showed in every one of the special elections where we won in Republican seats or seats that Republicans thought they would win. New York, of course, two Republican seats; in Pennsylvania a seat where Republicans made a maximum effort to win. In Hawaii we got 58 percent of the vote but there were three candidates, two of whom were Democrats in a winner take all election. So we believe we're strongly positioned to hold the House and that we will do so. Your turn.

Q Mr. Hoyer, you say you're in a strong position to hold the House here. Is the conventional wisdom just wrong in Washington, I mean, that there's these tides? I mean, when you start to look at some individual races and seats out West that wouldn't be employed otherwise in things. Is there just a thought that -- I mean, on your side of the aisle is this a confidence that you see something that others don't see or what?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, I certainly do see something I think that most people don't see. I travel around the country, as you well know. I've been to, I don't know during this cycle, 40 districts maybe, maybe more, 20 just in August and the first week in September. Members are confident, Members are prepared, Members are organized, Members see vulnerabilities in their opponents, and these elections are going to be won on the ground. And we have the money to get our message out. All of our Members are well armed with the ability to get our message

out and well organized on the ground. D triple C has shown a very significant ability to win races on the ground. You're talking the Critz race, for instance, which was essentially the same context we're in now, and Critz won by eight points, notwithstanding a huge independent expenditure against him with the same messages that they're now using.

Q Mr. Hoyer, aren't the House Democrats missing a big opportunity here politically to differentiate themselves from the Republicans by pushing this tax cut on the suspension calendar this week as Speaker Pelosi would favor? Doesn't this give the Republicans an opening?

Mr. Hoyer. Let me say, the Speaker and I are in absolute agreement, in case anybody wants to speculate on that, and Democrats are united. I don't know of a Democrat, as I have said repeatedly, and I told Dave McConnell this repeatedly yesterday, no tax increases on the first \$200,000 of every American's income, every American's income individually, and no taxes on the first \$250,000 of every American family's income, period. There is no disagreement in the Democratic Party on that proposition. And that will be done, and before the end of the year that will be accomplished. Now, we are obviously -- there is -- that objective is being held hostage in the Senate to an increase in the wealthiest in America.

Let me remind you that the reason we're in this position is because the Republicans in '01 and '03 passed bills which put us in this position, which said that these taxes would be phased out. Now, they

did that for budget reasons. I understand. I'm not alleging that's what they intended to do, but they were playing budget games. They were pretending that these tax cuts were not as expensive as they were. They didn't pay for them. They jettisoned statutory PAYGO and they created in the process under the Bush administration and total Republican control \$5 trillion of new debt. Inherited about 5.7, they took it to about 10-plus.

So the answer to your question is we're going to get that done. Whether we get it done this week or we get it done in the weeks to come, it will be done prior to the end of this year. And I want to reiterate, there should be nobody in America confused as to where Democrats are. Democrats are absolutely committed to making sure that there are no tax increases for middle income Americans under \$250,000, all Americans under \$250,000 between now and the end of the year. Now, excuse me, I misspoke, next year.

Q If Democrats are united why not hold a vote this week?

Mr. Hoyer. I've told you repeatedly that the Senate has not acted. Remember the three bills I just told you that were possibly going to be on the agenda? All bills that the Senate has passed and we know we can enact.

Q With all due respect, sir, the House has done many things that this Senate hasn't acted on to prove that they can get it done. Why not add this to the list before we leave?

Mr. Hoyer. Is there any confusion in this room where Democrats are? We're talking about the process of whether we can get something

done through the Senate. Frankly, I think if we thought we could get it through the Senate, absolutely we would act. And we may well act anyway.

Q On Sunday Representative Van Hollen said we may take it up before the mid-terms and you said the opposite. Which is the case?

Mr. Hoyer. No, I didn't say the opposite.

Q You said unlikely or that you doubt it.

Mr. Hoyer. Okay. That's not saying that we're not going to do it; it's saying I doubt we're going to do it.

Q Just to clarify, because I don't understand, so the suspension -- is the tax, middle class tax cut a candidate for the suspension calendar this week, is it?

Mr. Hoyer. It is certainly under consideration.

Q And when will that be decided, and what goes into that decision, what are the ingredients that go into that decision? Could you explain when and what?

Mr. Hoyer. Before we leave.

Q Quick thoughts on the Alan Grayson videos.

Mr. Hoyer. On the what?

Q On the Alan Grayson videos that is set to run. The mutilation of the Taliban ban videos against the opponent as well as considering military deferments to the draft dodging?

Mr. Hoyer. I haven't seen either one of them, so I can't comment.

Q Mr. Hoyer, you keep saying the Democrats want to take the country forward. Are there any specific items should you retain the

majority in the House that Democrats would like to do?

Mr. Hoyer. Absolutely.

Q And what are those items?

Mr. Hoyer. I have spoken this morning about the make it in America agenda. We believe very strongly that we need to move forward on reinstating the vigorous manufacturing and ability to make things in America which provided good paying, stable jobs for middle income working Americans. We have gained 136,000 manufacturing jobs over the last 18 months. We're showing progress. That's the first time. For 13 years we've been losing jobs. Actually 20 years we've been losing jobs in the manufacturing sector. We believe that is a long range agenda that we need to accomplish.

We're going to continue to invest in education, which we've been doing, so we can provide for the workforce for that growth in our economy that we need to compete in a global marketplace. We're going to continue to invest in the infrastructure in our country, which will again facilitate and allow for the growth in our economy. So when you educate your young people and not so young people with the skills and knowledge that they need to compete globally we're going to grow jobs. We are growing jobs. We had positive job growth, not only in the manufacturing sector, but in all sectors of the economy. As fast as we want? Absolutely not. We will continue to do that.

Thirdly, we will continue to do what we absolutely must do, and that is pursue fiscal balance. We did that, it wasn't just talk, we did that in the '90s creating balanced budgets through our policies.

Again, which all the Republicans opposed, the economic program.

So those are some of the things. We will also continue to focus on our national security, which we have been I think successful, as I said earlier, in making the country more secure as we have weakened both the Taliban and al Qaeda, both in Pakistan and in Afghanistan.

Q If I can just follow up briefly. Do you think this election should be about what you guys will do in the future or what you guys have done over the last Congress? What do you think is a better message to run on?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, I think both are essential messages. I think the American public polls are -- obviously, the American public are conflicted at this point. They have a lot of angst and anxiousness, and they want to make sure that whoever they elect is going to move them forward, and they're not sure who that is.

Very frankly, the facts show that in fact the country is moving forward. Not only have we gained some 700,000 jobs this year as opposed to losing 786,000 jobs in one month, in the last month of the Bush administration, we inherited the deepest economic recession in 75 years. The wealth of the country has increased by trillions of dollars. Our stock market is up 60 percent since the Recovery Act. Those are very important indications of progress.

We've also, in my opinion, made sure that we're going to stabilize health costs, make sure that individuals and their doctors are in charge of their health care, cannot be told by insurance companies, sorry, you can't get insurance because you have diabetes or you have some other

preexisting condition, or your child does. We have made sure that seniors are going to be able to afford their prescription drugs. I think those are very positive aspects that they think are very positive. That they can't be put into bankruptcy because they have lifetime limits if they get really sick, have cancer or some other catastrophic illness. And so obviously what we have done is part of the message and what we will do is part of the other message.

Again, I repeat to you the quote that was made by the Club for -- well, no, by David Frum, George Bush's, one of his speech writers, it's a pledge to do nothing. The American public don't believe that nothing is an appropriate response to the challenges confronting our country.

Q Mr. Hoyer, do you think they will have the CR by Wednesday and how quickly can you put it on the floor?

Mr. Hoyer. "Expect" is a tough word because that CR is now going through the U.S. Senate. I expect to take up the CR shortly after it gets here from the Senate. I hope that is by Wednesday, earlier rather than later.

Q And just one more question. When you get it how quickly can you put it on the floor here?

Mr. Hoyer. We can put it on there pretty quickly. We can certainly put it on within hours.

Q We obviously know the Democratic position on middle class tax cuts. You eloquently just stated it.

Mr. Hoyer. Thank you, thank you very much. Ladies and

gentlemen, I hope, his name is Luke Russert. You can just put that in quotes.

Q But about 30 days before the mid-terms --

Mr. Hoyer. Oh, yes, you want to ask this question again. It hasn't been asked enough.

Q -- why not put Republicans on the record as being against middle class tax cuts, why not do that?

Mr. Hoyer. Well, you know, I'm not sure they -- they're for extending all tax cuts, you know, as taxes that now exist, which was their bill. We understand that. However, it was very interesting. What happened when, as I said, in a few seconds of reasonableness the minority leader said, well, if that's the only thing I have to vote on, I'll vote for it. That is the middle class thing. What happened, folks? You all know what happened. He was excoriated by his party. What do you mean you would vote for that? What do you mean you would vote for middle class tax cuts? Only if the wealthiest in America get tax cuts will we support middle class tax cuts. The Wall Street Journal said he may not be worthy to be the leader, but that was such a dissent into reasonableness. Now, if they are for that let them say that. But once they said it for a second this party came down like a ton of bricks.

Q Why not call their bluff?

Mr. Hoyer. Apparently it's not a bluff. They have pretty much said in the Senate, you know, this is where we are. You know, we've seen their hand, so it's not a bluff.

Q Does Vice President Biden telling the Democrats to stop

whining and President Obama saying to wake up, does that energize the base for you going into 2010?

Mr. Hoyer. I think the base is getting more and more energized every day when they see, as Senator Biden said, as long as you're running against the almighty you're going to lose, when you run against the alternative we're going to win.

Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 12:00 p.m., the press conference was concluded.]